



JULIA BAGCHI

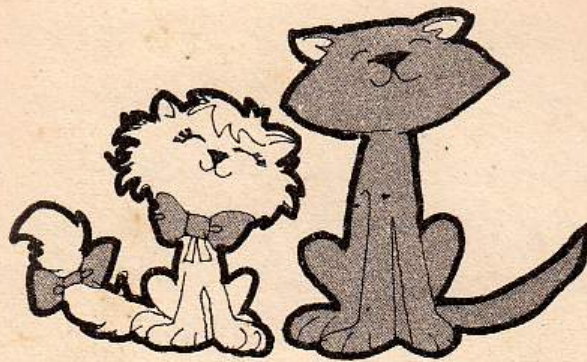
ADRAK

The Ginger
Cat



ADRAK

The Ginger Cat



by **Julia Bagchi**

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CONTENTS

1. <i>New Neighbours</i>	5
2. <i>Adrak Pays a Visit</i>	11
3. <i>Priyatama</i>	15
4. <i>Mouse Hunting</i>	23
5. <i>Lost in the Rafters</i>	33
6. <i>Rescue</i>	34
7. <i>Adrak the Hero</i>	41

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Chapter I

NEW NEIGHBOURS

It was raining. The sky was grey with heavy monsoon clouds. People hurried by in the street clutching umbrellas and splashing through large puddles of muddy water. All the saris and trousers were damp to the knees.

“How miserable everything looks,” Adrak thought. After all, no self-respecting cat likes water. Water means getting wet and everyone knows that cats don’t like getting wet. Adrak was no exception. He yawned and stretched. “No, I’m much better off where I am,” he decided, as he settled down comfortably, tucking his fine, thick tail around him. He watched the rain as it splashed against the window-pane.

Suddenly a large truck drew up and stopped outside the house across the street. The truck was piled high with luggage, and the luggage was covered with tarpaulin. Adrak sat up and stared. His golden eyes became round with interest. For a long time the house had stood empty. A board had been put up outside with large letters saying ‘TO

LET' painted on it. It was a large, old, three-storeyed house with many windows.

Adrak had often thought with longing of all the lovely fat mice that must be living inside. "Just imagine all those long narrow corridors with cracks in the floors and holes in the walls. Why, the whole house must be full of mice!" If only he could get inside, what a wonderful time he would have hunting. Unfortunately, everything had been left securely locked and barred. Not even one small window had been left open for Adrak to slip through.

Some men started to unload the truck and carry the contents into the old house. Adrak opened his yellow eyes wider and flicked his tail. "Someone must be coming to live there," he thought. "I wonder who it will be."

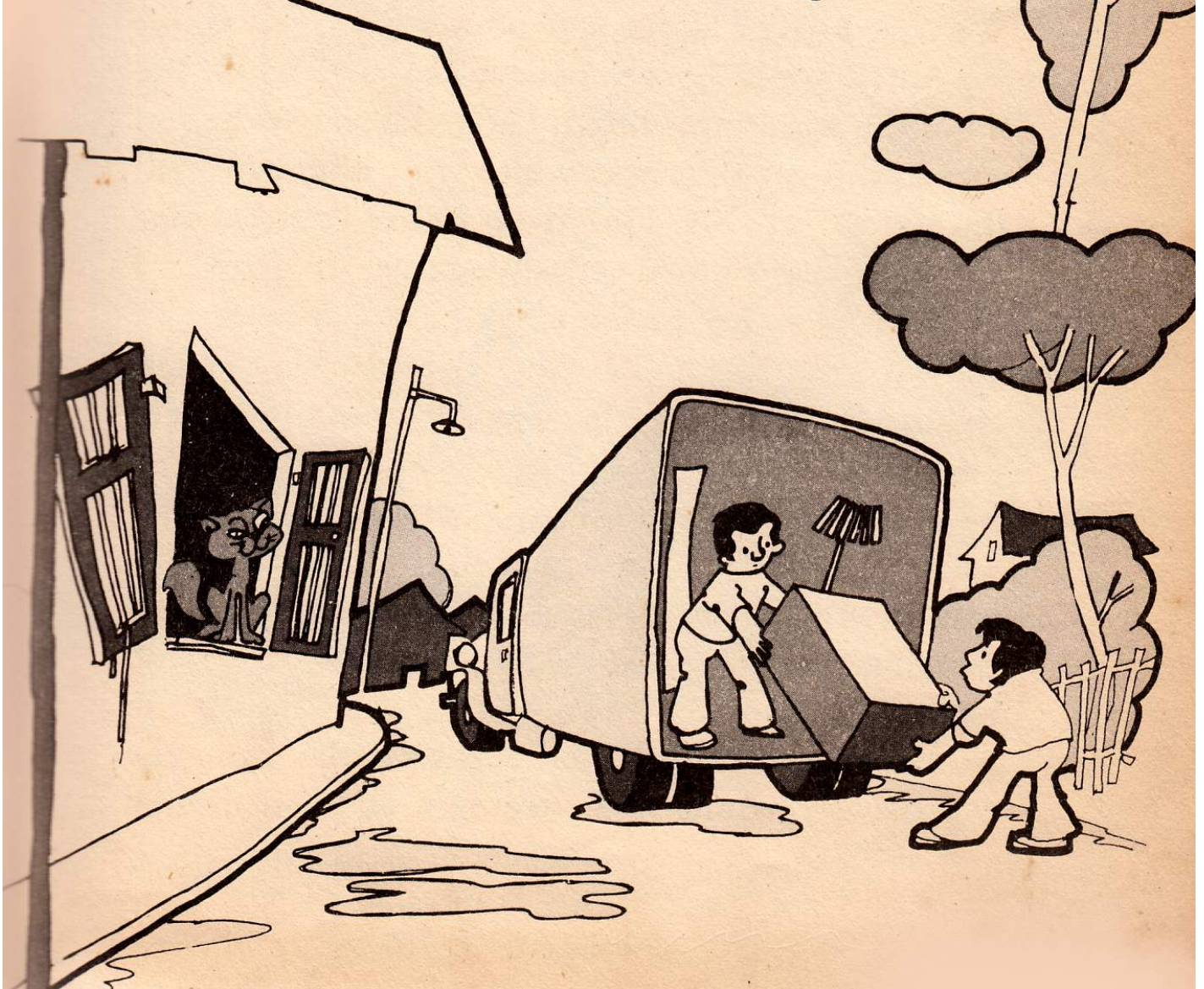
He watched while the men carried tables, chairs, cupboards, carpets and all sorts of strange-looking objects into the house. When they had finished they climbed back into the truck and drove away.

Adrak could not contain his curiosity a moment longer. He jumped down from his seat on the window-ledge and padded across the room to the door. He pushed it open with a determined paw and went down the corridor and out through

the front door into the garden. The rain had stopped and the sky had begun to lighten, but everything was still wet. There were muddy puddles everywhere and bright droplets of water clung to the trees and bushes and grass, making them glisten.

Adrak crossed the garden and jumped over the low wall into the street. Just then a shiny black car rounded the corner and stopped in front of the big house.

Adrak watched while the driver got out of



the car and opened a large umbrella to catch the water still dripping from the trees. Then he opened the back door of the car and held it while a pretty but plump lady climbed out. She stepped daintily over a puddle so as not to spoil her fine silk sari and waited while the driver reached into the back of the car and handed her a cane basket. A loud *miaow* came from inside the basket.

"Priyatama, darling," the pretty lady cooed soothingly. "Don't be a silly pussycat. It's all over. We have arrived at our new house."

Adrak could hardly believe his eyes when the lid of the basket was lifted. He had never seen such a beautiful cat. She was white with blue eyes and the softest fur. She looked up at her mistress and miaowed. She seemed very unhappy.

"*Bas, Bas*, my precious, you mustn't be afraid. We will go inside and I will give you a big bowl of cream for being such a good pussy," the pretty lady promised.

Adrak put his head to one side and stared while the lady walked gracefully up the drive and into the house carrying the basket. The driver, carrying several boxes and suitcases, followed behind them.

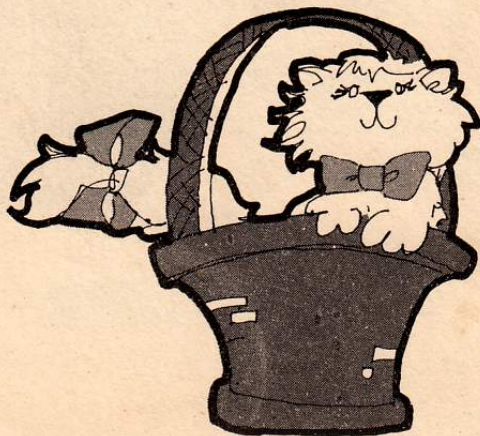
Adrak sat sniffing the scent of the woman's expensive perfume and dreaming about dishes of

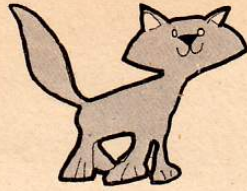


cream. The only time he had ever known such luxury was when his mistress had accidentally knocked over the cream jug and he had licked up the drops that had spilled onto the floor.

The house he lived in was smaller and newer. His master and mistress were well enough off, but not so that they could afford to be wasteful. They fed Adrak well, but expected him also to do his own hunting. It was only when the children were home for holidays that Adrak ever got a little extra, like real raw meat or fish. But never oh! never had he had a whole bowl of cream all to himself.

“Oh well,” he sighed, “I suppose Priyatama is rather special. I am just an ordinary cat and can’t be compared to her.” He was suddenly aware that it had started to rain again, so he took himself off to his favourite place in the back verandah where he settled down amongst some broken flower-pots for a nap until dinner.





Chapter II

ADRAK PAYS A VISIT

The next morning the sun was shining brightly. Not a cloud was in the sky. Adrak sat washing his paws in the middle of the vegetable garden. He had had a good breakfast of fish bones and stale chapatis. He was glad that it was a nice sunny day. The sunlight glinted on his golden fur and he liked its pleasing warmth. After a while Adrak decided to take a stroll across to the big house and find out how the new people were settling in.

There was nobody to be seen at first. Then he heard voices coming through the windows opening on to the verandah. He recognised the voices of the pretty lady who was Priyatama's mistress. He jumped up to the window-ledge and peered around the heavy velvet curtains. The room beyond was large and spacious. It was piled high with boxes, packing cases, paper and all sorts of china and ornaments. The lady herself was seated on a silk-covered sofa and lying beside her was Priyatama. Her mistress was stroking her and at the same time giving instructions to a couple of servants who were



bustling about unpacking the boxes.

"Do be careful with that vase, Sita, it's very valuable," cried Priyatama's mistress. Sita obediently carried the delicate looking china vase and placed it carefully on a small table.

Adrak felt quite sure that everyone was much too busy to take any notice of him. He jumped quietly into the room and settled down under a chair. From this position he could easily see what was going on. He could even hear Priyatama purring contentedly. He was able to see her much more clearly this morning and he was even more convinced that she was the most beautiful pussy-cat, he had ever seen.

The unpacking continued for some time. Adrak had never seen so many fine things. Priyatama's mistress was obviously very rich. The carpet was soft and springy beneath his paws. He curled down into it, watching and listening. Presently his eyes closed and he fell asleep.

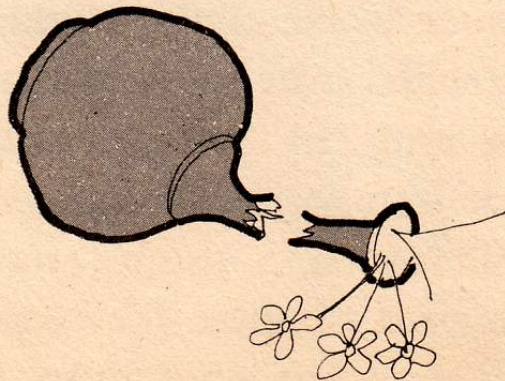
He wasn't sure of exactly how long he had been asleep. The next thing he knew was that someone was screaming and the woman called Sita was rushing towards him waving a *jharoo*.

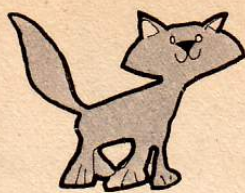
"*Hut! Hut!* You nasty thing, *arre hut!*" Adrak didn't need a second warning. He streaked out from under the chair and headed blindly for the door.

Something was in his way, he wasn't sure what. In his terror he barged straight into it but he didn't stop. There was a crash behind him. Someone, he thought it was Priyatama's mistress, gave a cry of dismay. "Oh my precious Chinese vase!"

He reached the door. There was nothing to stop him now. He fled down a corridor, through another door and leapt through a window that was mercifully open. Even then he didn't stop. Across the garden he sped and over the wall. Only when he reached his own back verandah did he flop down to listen to the thumping of his heart.

"What unfriendly people," he said, thinking of his narrow escape. "My mistress may not give me cream every day, but she is kind-hearted. If I had broken her vase, she would never have chased me out of the house. I am sure she understands that accidents can happen to any cat!"





Chapter III
PRIYATAMA

Several days passed before Adrak found enough courage to go to the big house again. He had thought several times about paying Priyatama a visit. After all, Adrak said to himself, it wasn't her fault that the rest of the household had been so unfriendly. She was probably feeling very lonely in a strange place. Adrak felt it was his duty to make friends with her.

He was in a good mood. It was another lovely day. The birds were singing and bees and butterflies were flitting from flower to flower.

The moment Adrak climbed onto the wall he saw Priyatama. She was quite alone, sitting in a shady spot underneath a neem tree. "It's my lucky day," Adrak thought. He jumped lightly down from the wall and strolled over to where she was sitting. Priyatama saw him coming but pretended to take no notice.

"Hi!" Adrak smiled in his most friendly fashion. Priyatama stiffened slightly but made no reply. She continued to stare into space. Adrak made



another attempt. After all, she was probably shy.

"How do you like this place?" he asked. "Have you caught any mice yet? There must be lots of them in the old house. It's been empty for ages."

Priyatama regarded him coldly. "If you are talking to me," she said, "I don't go for that kind of thing. I hate mice and I can't be bothered chasing them."

"Just imagine!" Adrak was surprised. "A cat who doesn't like mice! It's unnatural!"

"Nobody asked for your opinion," replied Priyatama haughtily. "As a matter of fact you had better be careful coming over here. My mistress was very upset the other day when you so clumsily broke her valuable Chinese vase. She would be very angry if she knew you were here."

"Oh that was an accident, I'm not usually so clumsy," Adrak said. "That Sita really scared me, screaming and rushing at me like that! It wasn't very friendly. After all, I wasn't doing any harm."

"Well you had no business to come creeping into someone's house that way," said Priyatama, turning her nose up.

"You all looked so busy," Adrak said apologetically, "I didn't want to interrupt. I only wanted to welcome you to the neighbourhood. By the way, my name is Adrak."

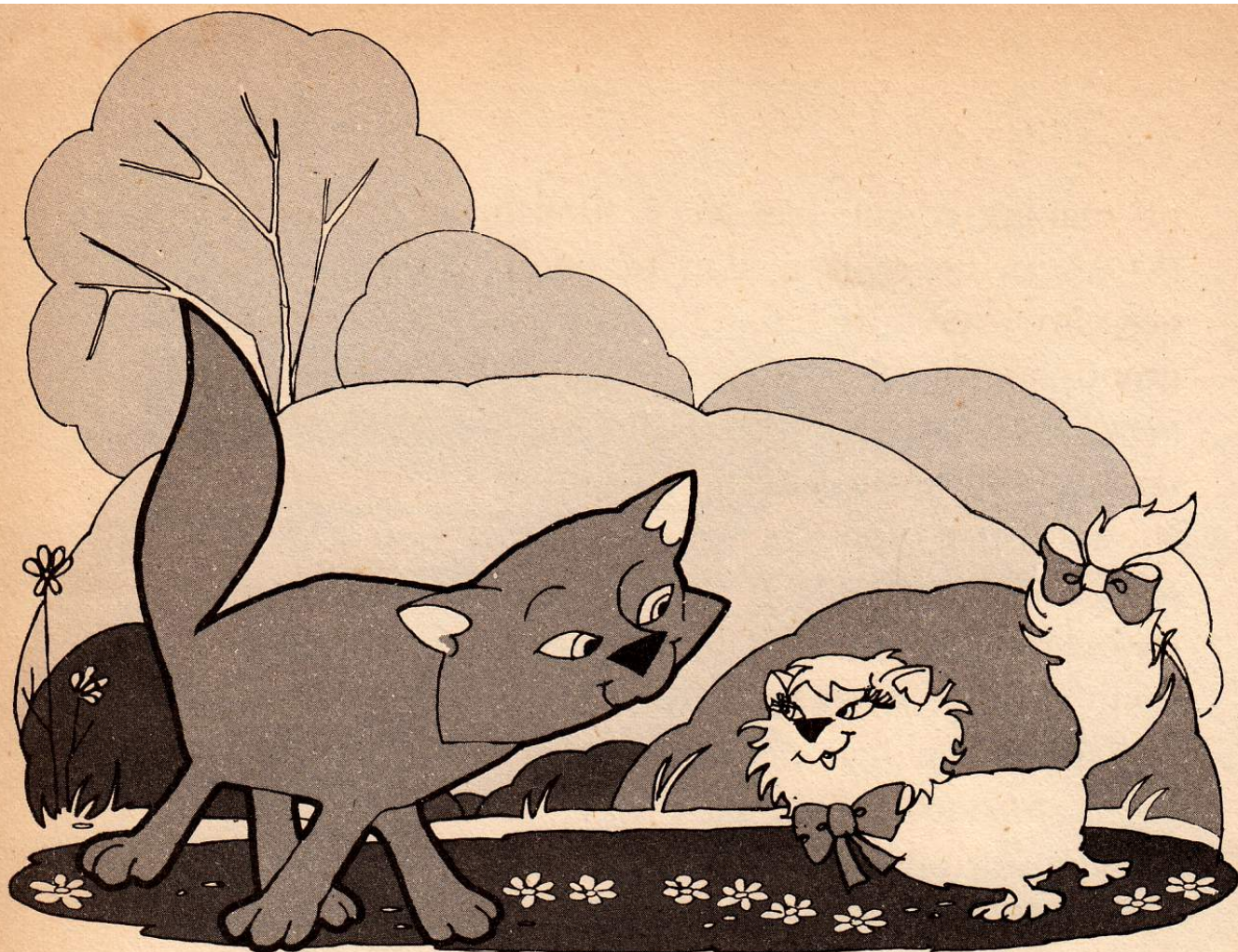
"Adrak!" Priyatama exclaimed. "What an extraordinary name." She gave a little sniff of distaste.

"Well I think Priyatama is a very nice name," Adrak said, trying hard not to show his disappointment at the fact that she didn't think much of his.

"Actually Priyatama suits you very well."

"*Thank* you," Priyatama said, "I think it's a nice name too. Names are really *very* important, don't you think?"

"Oh I don't know," Adrak said. "Adrak's not



bad. After all, what's in a name?"

"*Everything*," Priyatama replied. "Just imagine being entered for a cat show with a name like ADRAK!"

Adrak laughed. "I don't intend entering any cat shows."

"Naturally you wouldn't. You must have a pedigree before you can do that."

"What's a pedigree?" Adrak asked.

"You mean to say that you don't even know what a pedigree is?" Priyatama said with disbelief.

Adrak hung his head. Priyatama had a way

of making a cat feel very foolish, he thought.

"A pedigree is a sign of good breeding. It's *very* important. It tells you who your parents and grandparents were. I, for example, come from a very high class of well-bred cats. My mother was very famous. She won prizes in at least a hundred cat shows in her time."

"Imagine that," Adrak said, trying to sound enthusiastic. Actually he just couldn't see the point of it all. "My mother was a terrific rat-catcher," he said.

"I can well imagine *that*!" Priyatama said in a most insulting manner.

"Oh well," Adrak said, "I had better be going. I only came round to pay a friendly visit and to apologise for breaking the vase the other day. Since you don't want to be friends, I'll go home."

"Don't be angry," Priyatama said suddenly as he turned to go. "I didn't mean to offend you. It's just that you seemed so stupid."

"Well, thank you very much!" Adrak replied. "It's not my fault that I don't know anything about pedigrees and cat shows and such things. Anyway, I don't see the sense in it."

"Of *course* it makes sense," Priyatama cried. "I've won a *lot* of prize money in cat shows for my mistress."

"You mean that *you* have actually been entered for cat shows yourself?" Adrak asked in amazement.

"Of course I have, lots of times. I nearly *always* win them too," Priyatama added proudly.

"Well, each to his own taste," Adrak said. "Personally I think catching mice is more useful and much more fun. There must be hundreds of mice in your house. Just think how pleased your mistress would be if you got rid of them. Most ladies are scared stiff of mice. She would really think you were a clever cat."

"I don't know about that," Priyatama said doubtfully. "I've never actually tried it."

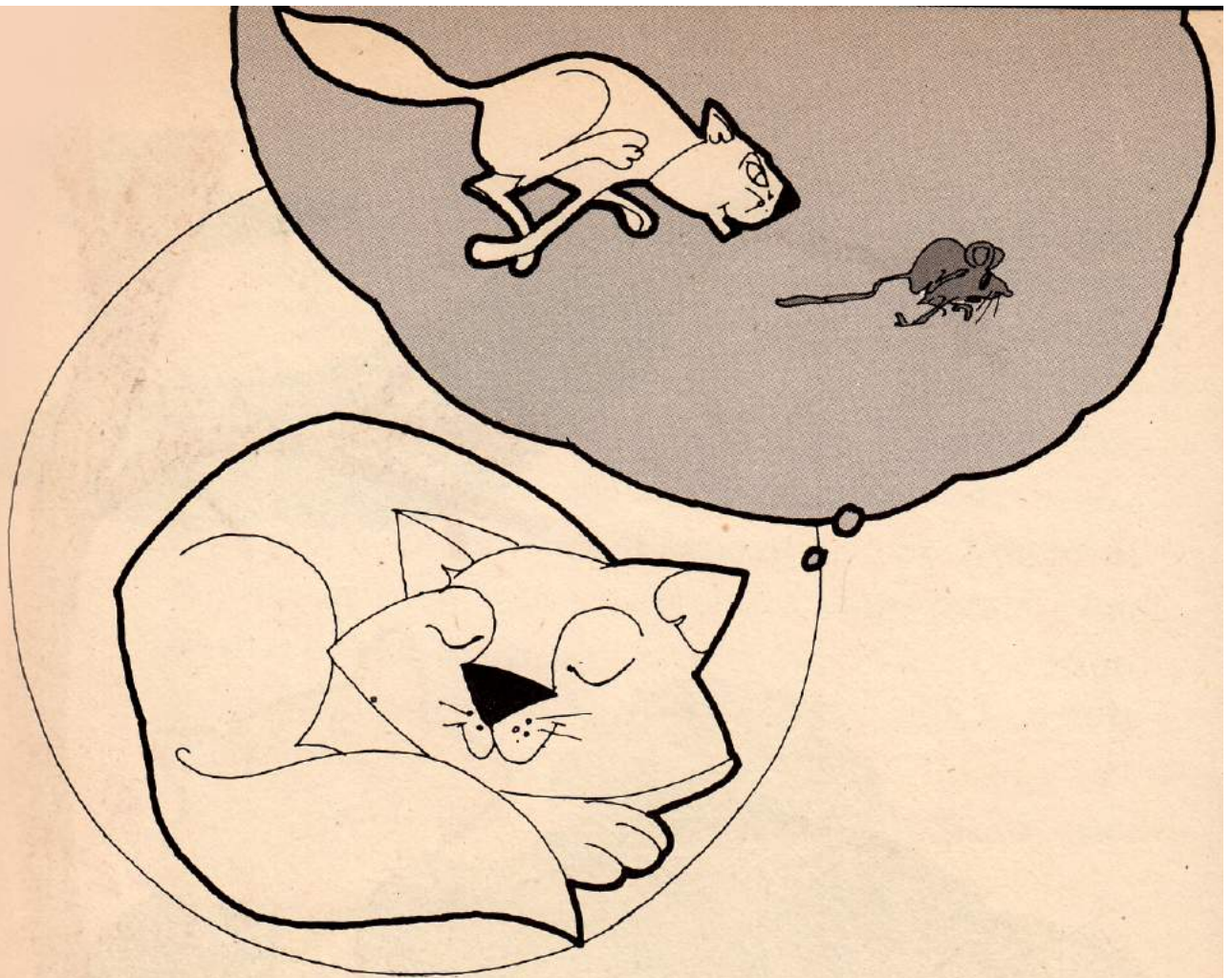
"Oh it's great fun," Adrak said enthusiastically. "I could help you if you like. We could go mouse hunting together one day. I'll take good care of you. You needn't be afraid."

Priyatama hesitated. "I suppose it couldn't do any harm just once," she said.

"Oh good!" Adrak was delighted. "Let's go tonight. Mice are less on their guard at night. Also it will be better if I keep out of sight during the day time. As you said I'm not very popular after having broken the Chinese vase the other day."

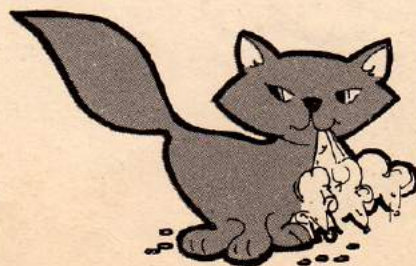
"Oh very well," Priyatama said. "I suppose tonight is as good as any other. My mistress goes to bed around 11 o'clock. The small window in the





entrance hall is always left open for me. Come around midnight—everyone will be asleep by then.”

Adrak felt like purring all the way home. For a long time he had dreamed about hunting in the old house. He was sure that it would be full of mice. Oh, he could hardly wait for the day to be over and for the night to come!





Chapter IV

MOUSE HUNTING

Adrak dozed in his favourite chair. Everyone had gone to bed and the house was quiet except for the ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece. Adrak stretched his paws contentedly. Any minute now the clock would strike twelve. "The magic hour," he thought. The moment he had been waiting for.

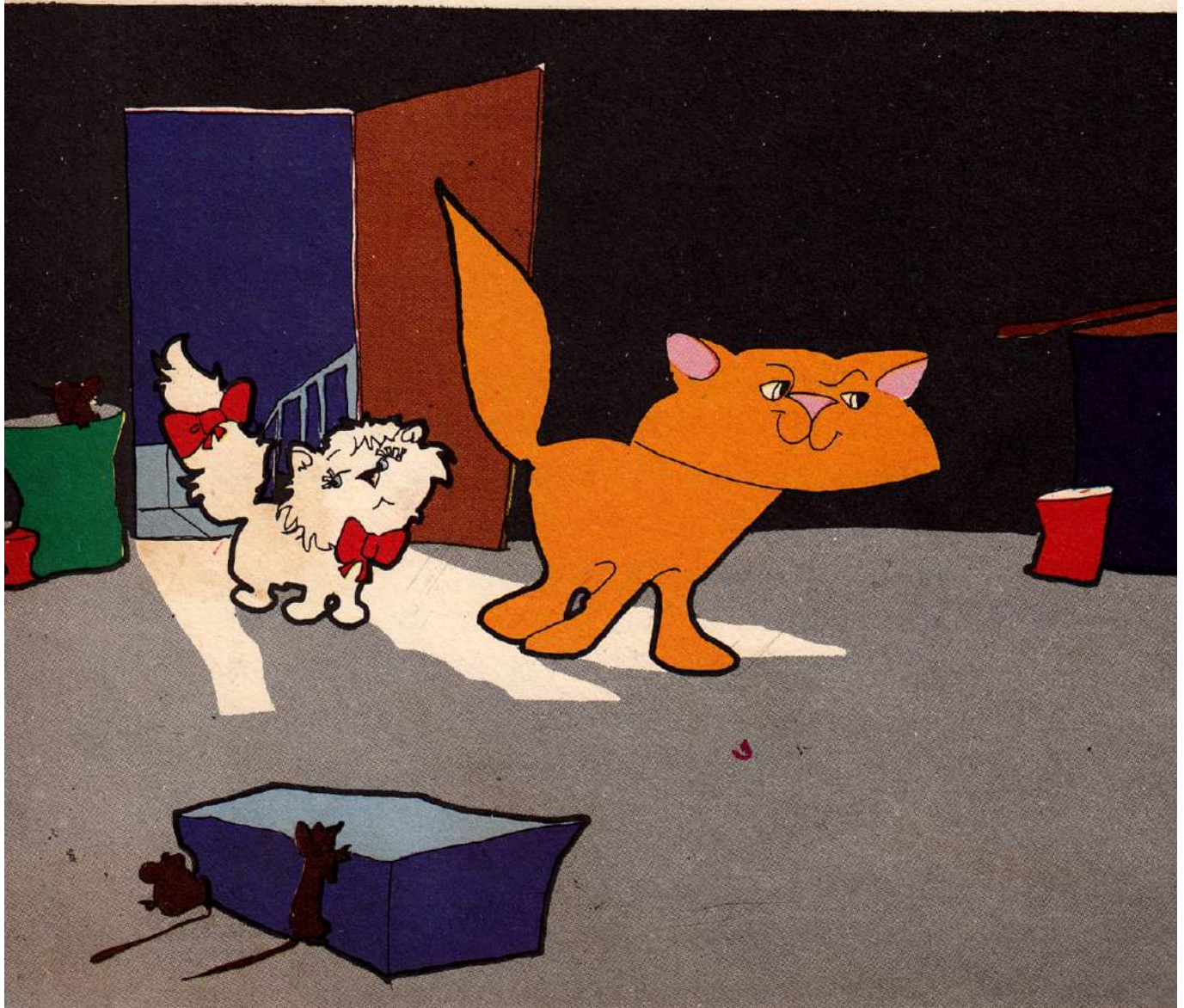
He appeared quite relaxed, when in fact every muscle was alert and ready to spring into action. At the first chime of the clock he was up and making his way eagerly towards the door. Outside, the night was very black. The moon was hiding behind some clouds and a cool breeze ruffled his fur. Adrak was not afraid of the dark because cats can see quite well in the dark. He jumped over the garden wall. An owl hooted in a nearby tree. "Yes it is definitely a good night for hunting," he thought.

When he reached the big house he found Priyatama waiting for him. She was rather nervous. Unlike Adrak, she wasn't used to night-time adventures. She was glad to see him.

"Don't worry," Adrak said cheerily, "it's the

mice who should be worried. Come on, you'll have to lead the way. I think we should go up to the top of the house and work down from there."

Softly, silently, the two cats climbed the staircase. Up they went, past the first two floors. When they reached the top of the second stairway Priyatama turned to the left and led the way along a corridor heading towards the next flight of stairs. This staircase was much narrower and more winding. They climbed into the attic.

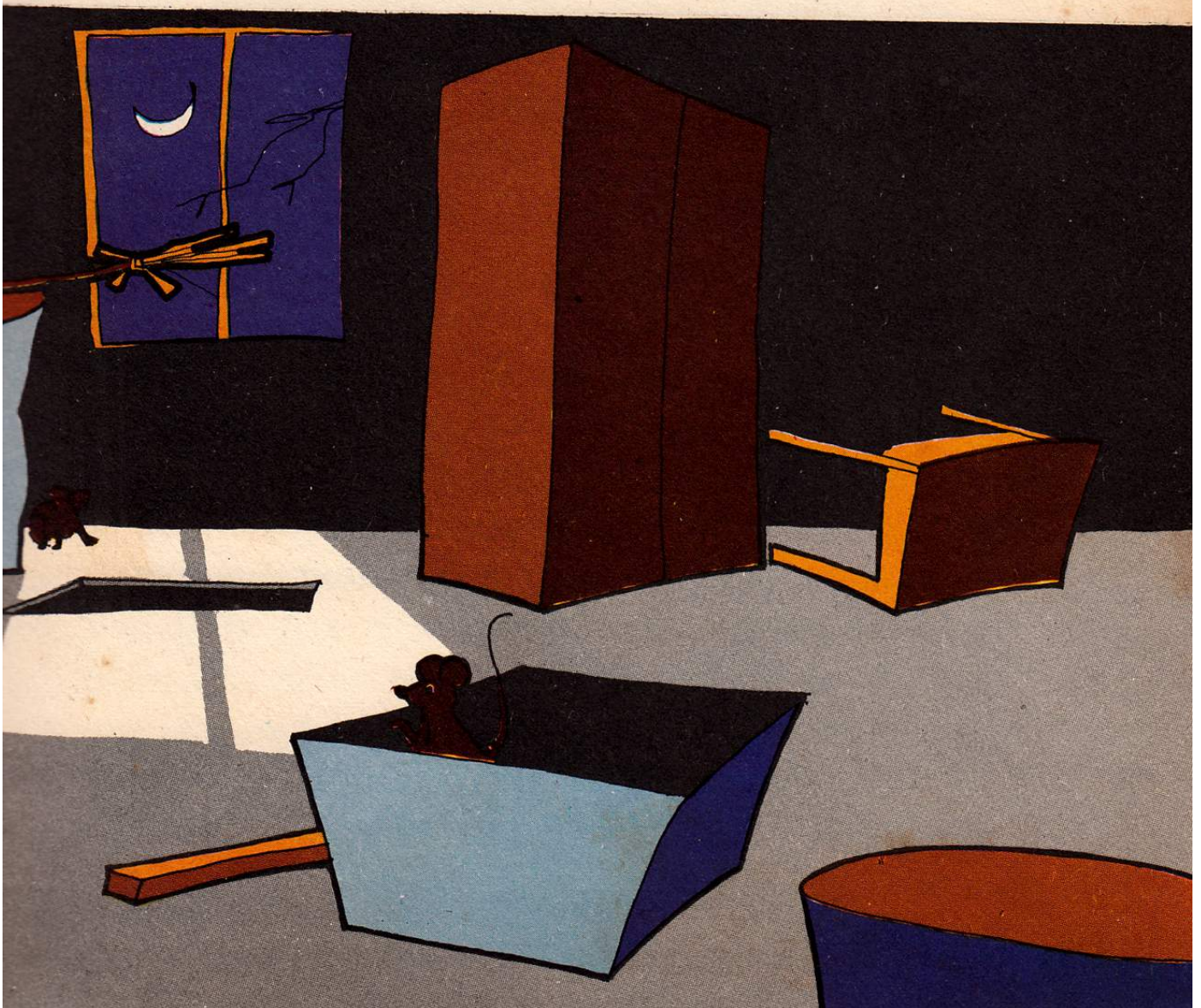


"I've never been up here before," Priyatama whispered.

"What's this part of the house used for?" Adrak asked.

"It's not used for anything," Priyatama replied. "My mistress said it would be useful for storing things, but nobody comes up here except the sweeper sometimes."

"Good," Adrak said. Then suddenly he hissed, "Do you notice that smell?"



Priyatama looked at Adrak in surprise. His nose and whiskers were quivering and the fur on his back was standing on end.

“What is it?” Priyatama asked, feeling rather alarmed.

“Mice,” Adrak said, still hissing. “Lots and lots of mice.”

“Where?” Priyatama asked.

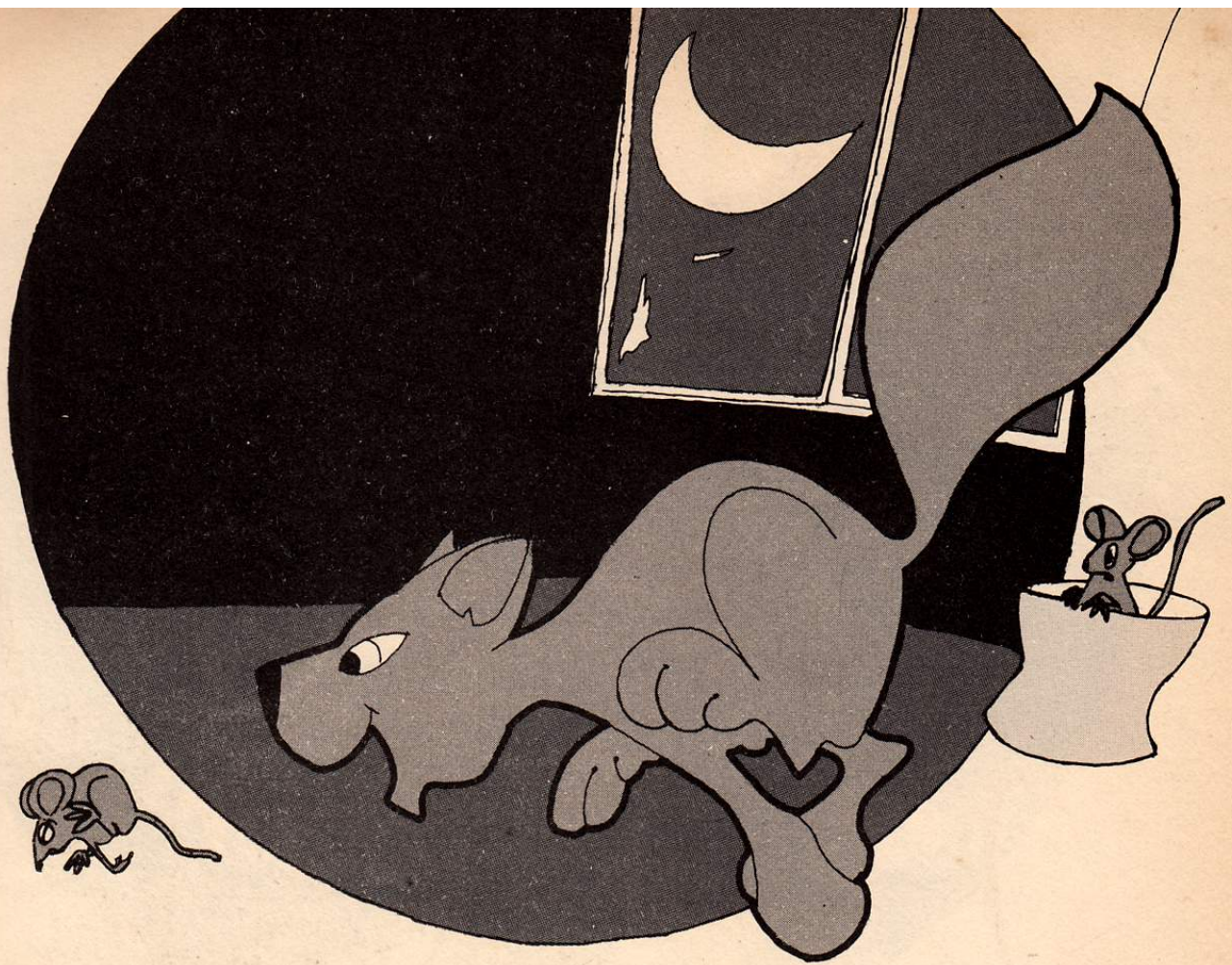
“Shhh, just keep quiet and follow me,” Adrak said softly, and began creeping forward along the narrow corridor at the top of the stairs. Priyatama followed rather hesitantly. Suddenly Adrak stopped. Priyatama heard a small scuffling sound just ahead of them. Quick as a lightning flash, Adrak sprang. There was a squeal and then a thud. Priyatama was too afraid to move. Then something scuttled past almost beneath her paws. She caught sight of a fat mouse.

“Quick, catch it!” Adrak cried. Priyatama was frozen with fear. She couldn’t move a single paw.

Then Adrak came hurtling past after the mouse. Next moment he was back carrying something in his mouth. He proudly laid the mouse at Priyatama’s feet for her to see. Priyatama looked at it and shuddered.

“Please can we go now?” she said.

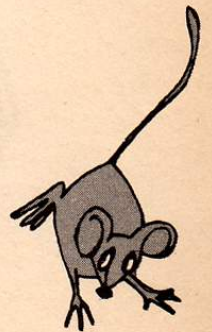
“Of course not,” Adrak said. “This is only the beginning. There are lots more mice to catch.



Enough to keep us busy the whole night.”

Priyatama heard more scuffling sounds from a room that led off to the right of them. The door was slightly ajar. At once Adrak was alert. Stalking low he slipped through the opening into the room. In the corner were three mice. They were chasing around in a shaft of moonlight that shone in through a window. Adrak pounced silently. The mice were taken unawares. He caught two of them, but the third escaped into a nearby crack.

In the meantime, Priyatama had gone off on her own in the direction of the staircase. She was





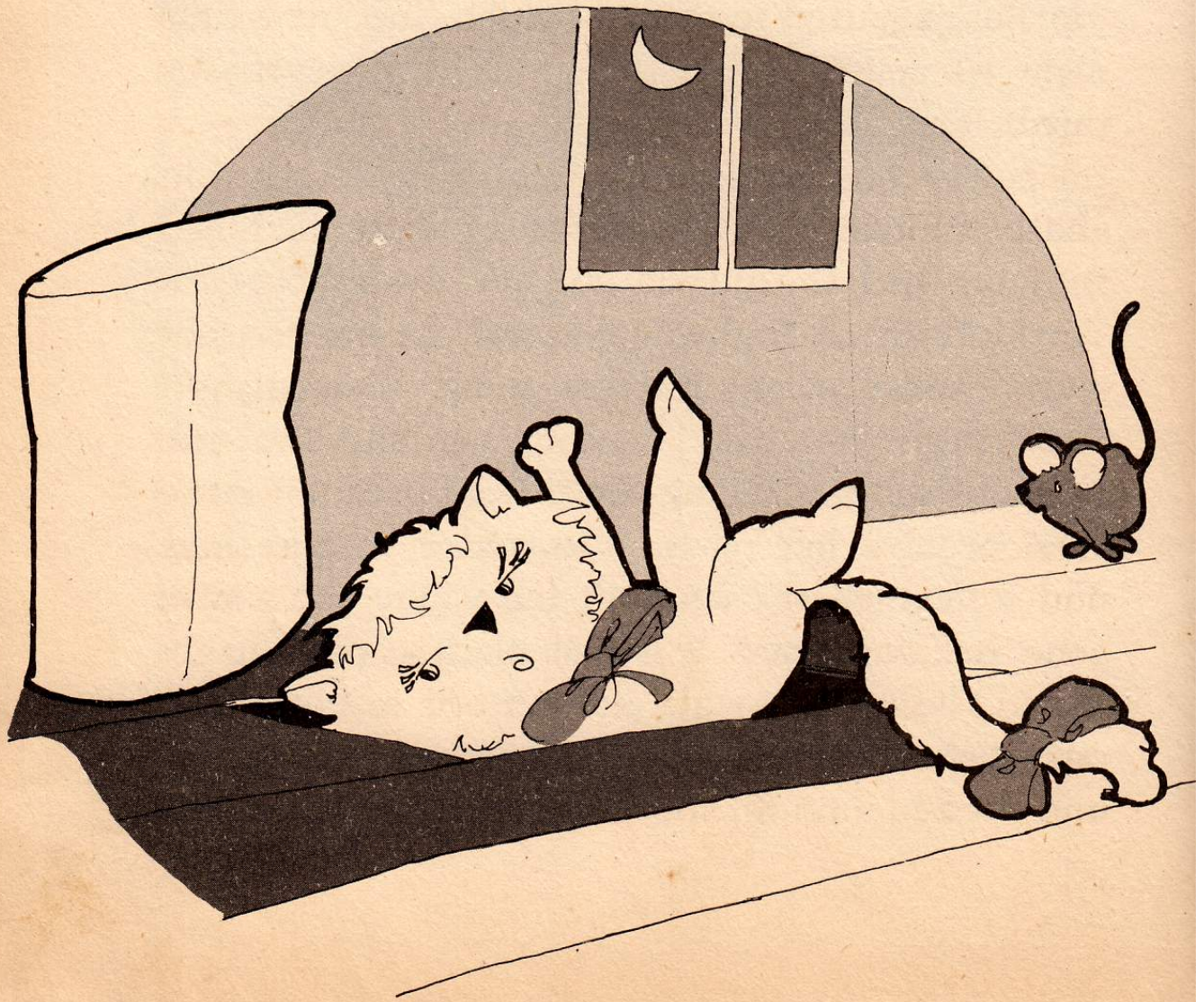
angry with Adrak. Why should he insist on playing his silly games? He had caught one mouse and knowing that she wanted to go, he should have been content. Still, she thought, he is a cat without breeding and breeding always shows in the end. She was stupid to have listened to him in the first place.

Priyatama had almost reached the top of the stairs. Suddenly she saw a pair of eyes glinting at her out of the darkness. She could make out a large, dark shape. She stopped. Panic rose inside her. Her heart started to thump wildly. She knew right away what it was even though she had never seen one before. She had seen mice—but this!

It was a huge, black, ugly rat. The rat bared its sharp pointed teeth. Priyatama stood terrified for a minute, then she turned and fled back down the corridor with a frightened squeal. In her fear she didn't notice where she was going. Suddenly the floorboards gave way beneath her and the next moment she was falling down head over tail into a hole beneath her paws. She landed with a thud. For a moment she couldn't tell where she was or what had happened. It was as black as pitch in the hole. The air was stale and seemed to choke her. She started to sneeze. She realized she wasn't hurt and tried to scramble out of the hole, but each time

she fell back again. She could find no foothold. At last she collapsed, quite worn out from her useless efforts. She felt helpless and alone.

Adrak heard Priyatama's cry for help. He sped out of the room, forgetting all about the mice. Instantly his sensitive nose smelt the rat. He headed towards it. The next moment he was face to face with the monster. It was the largest and most fearsome rat Adrak had ever seen. He hesitated a moment at the thought of fighting with someone so fierce. His fur stiffened and he felt a

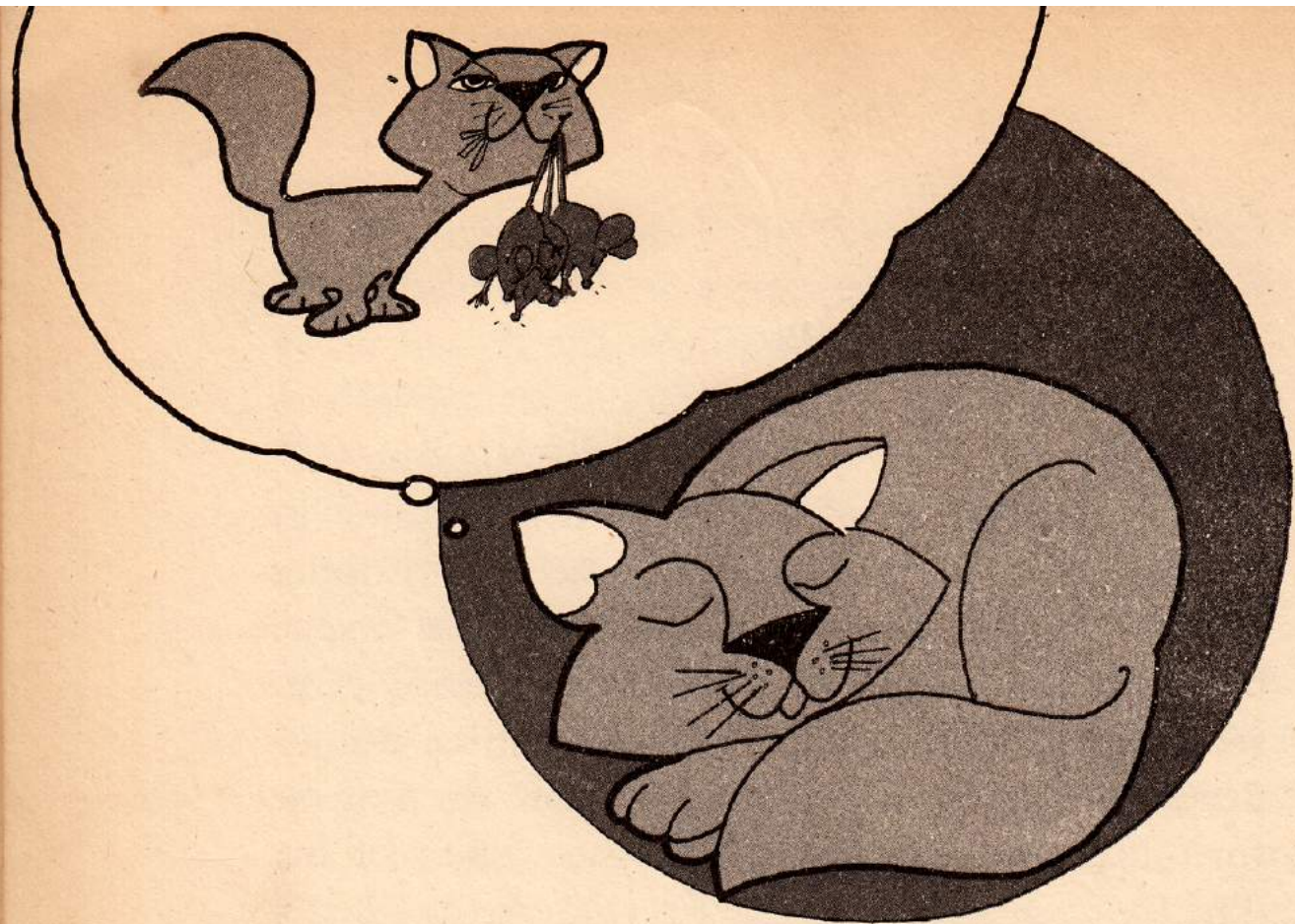


blood-chilling tingle all the way down his spine.

He approached the rat warily. The rat, finding itself cornered, turned to attack. Adrak was ready for it. It was not for nothing that he was known as a good hunter.

He crouched low, gathering his muscles in readiness for the spring. Then he was leaping forward straight at the animal's back. He landed on target, the full force of his body behind him. Cat and rat rolled over and over in a deadly struggle. Then Adrak got his chance. He was on top holding the rat down with the weight of his body. He sank his sharp, strong teeth into the beast's throat. He flung it up and lashed at it with a powerful paw. Then he grabbed it by the throat again and shook it hard with all his strength. The rat fell to the floor—dead.

While he was fighting the rat, Adrak had not given a thought to Priyatama. Now he looked anxiously around for her. He was sure that it was the rat that had frightened her. He went back down the corridor and looked into the room. There was nothing except the two dead mice. "She must have gone back downstairs," he thought. "She's probably in bed asleep by now. I can't really blame her. I feel rather sleepy myself. It's almost morning and I mustn't be found here."



Adrak made his way back down the stairs and out into the garden. He was rather disappointed that Priyatama had left him so abruptly. "She didn't even say good-night," he thought, as he crossed the road to his own house. The last few stars were twinkling in the sky and already there was a rosy glow in the east. Tired but pleased, Adrak reached his house and curled up happily in his favourite place. He yawned. It had been a long and exciting night. Soon he was sleeping soundly.





Chapter V

LOST IN THE RAFTERS

Priyatama had quite exhausted herself in useless attempts to climb out of the hole. It was a space between the floor of the attic and the ceiling of the second floor. A hole in the rafters, which was too deep for her to spring out of without catching her fur on the broken edges of the floor boards above. The opening was just large enough for her to have fallen through but too small for her to get out of. She had waited in the hope that Adrak would come in search of her. She waited and waited. Time passed and at last she realised how hopeless it was. She felt cold and miserable, trapped in a dark prison from which there seemed no escape.

“Perhaps I shall be left here forever!” she wailed. “Oh dear, what will become of me?”





Chapter VI

RESCUE

The next morning all was chaos in the big house. Priyatama's mistress had discovered that her precious cat was missing. She was very upset. Her breakfast tray was carried away untouched by Sita and Bimala the cook made loud noises of disapproval.

"What a fuss memsahib is making over a silly animal," she muttered. "The cat will turn up, I'm telling you. Cats are like that. They are most ungrateful creatures."

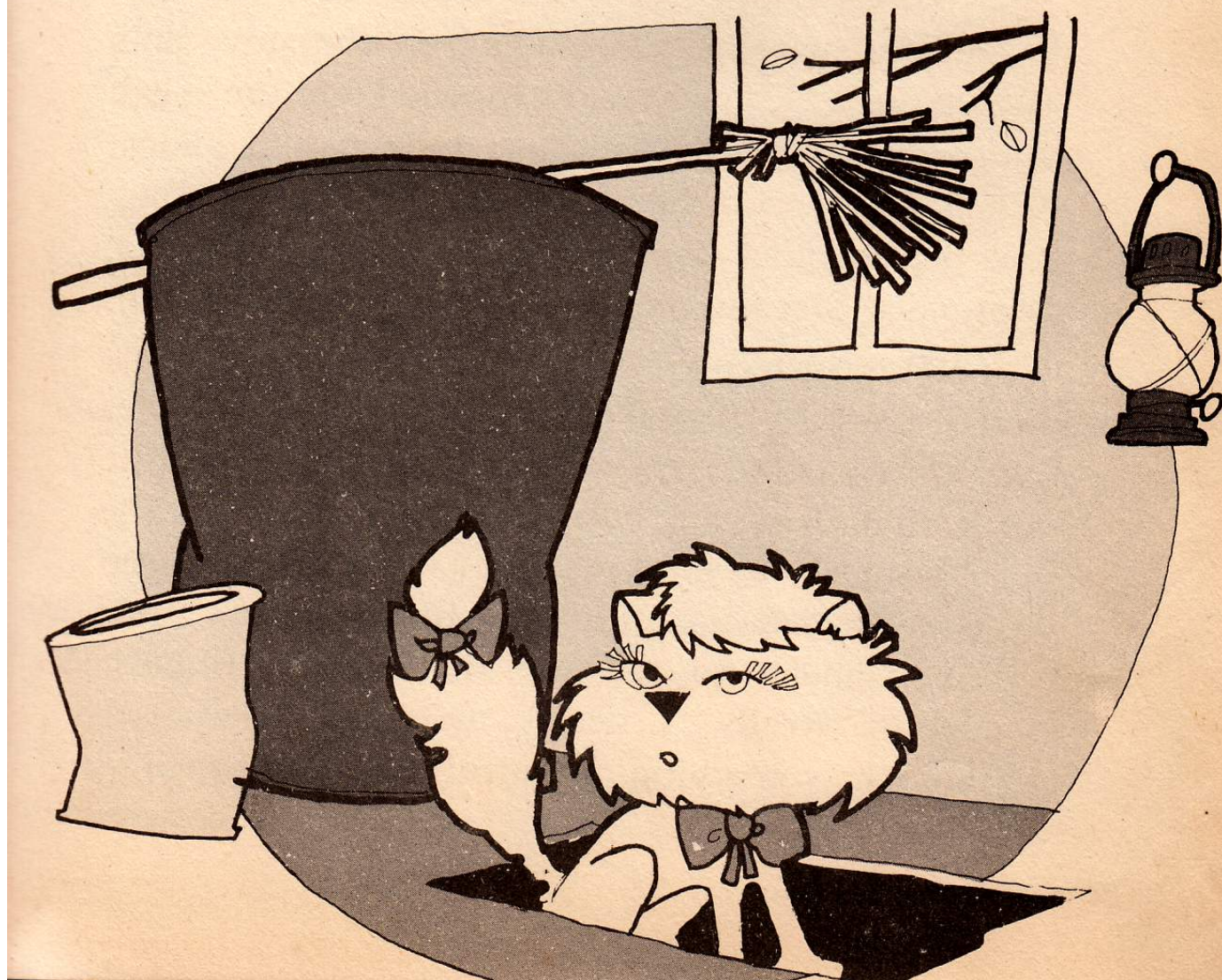
"Memsahib is extremely fond of that cat," Sita said. "I never could understand it myself. It's almost like a baby to her. Still, I don't like seeing her so upset. She looks so pale and her pretty eyes are all red from crying. I tried to tell her that the cat would come back. She took no notice of me. She just went on about how the cat had never been missing before and that something dreadful must have happened to it. The only thing we can do is to search until we find it."

"That's all very well," Bimala grumbled, "but

where do we start looking? I have a lot of work to do. I don't have time to go cat hunting."

"Neither do I," Sita retorted. "But until that cat has been found none of us will have any peace. I'm going to start looking at the top of the house." With that, Sita left the kitchen and went upstairs.

In the rafters Priyatama awoke with a start. She couldn't remember going to sleep but sometime during the night she had dropped off. At first she couldn't remember where she was. Then she recalled all the dreadful things that had happened



the night before. The grey morning light filtered down through the opening in the broken floorboards above her. Priyatama felt very sorry for herself.

"Oh please, somebody come and help me," she miaowed.

At that moment, Sita reached the top of the stairs. The first thing she saw was the body of an enormous dead rat. She screamed. It was such a loud scream that Bimala the cook heard it right down in the kitchen.

"What's happened?" she cried. She left the pot of dal that she was stirring on the stove and rushed out to see what had happened. Up the stairs she went as fast as her huge bulk would allow. When she reached the second floor, she was puffing and panting and out of breath. There she met a frightened Sita running down the stairs.

"Oh save me, save me," Sita cried.

"What is the matter?" Bimala said.

"Oh a terrible sight it is!"

"What's a terrible sight? Speak up, girl!"

"A monstrous great rat," Sita replied, beginning to recover herself a little in Bimala's presence.

"You mean to tell me that's all?" Bimala snapped. "Really, I nearly had a heart attack! I thought something dreadful had happened."



“It gave me such a nasty shock,” Sita said feeling rather ashamed of her foolishness.

“Where is the rat now?” Bimala asked.

“It’s still up there,” Sita said pointing to the top landing. “It’s lying dead at the top of the stairs—a great huge thing.”

Bimala pushed past Sita up the staircase.

“Ram, Ram!” she exclaimed when she saw the body of the rat. “We’d better call the mali to come and take it away. I wouldn’t like to have a thing like that running around in my kitchen.”

Priyatama heard the voices of the servants. She started miaowing with all her might.



"I can hear a cat miaowing," said Bimala.

"Do you think it's Priyatama?" Sita asked hopefully. As the two women set off in the direction of the noise, the miaowing got louder.

"Careful here," Sita said. "Part of the floor has rotted away at the end of the corridor."

They soon discovered Priyatama. "Oh! Poor thing!" Sita said, peering down into the hole.

"There, there, we'll soon have you out," Bimala said gently, quite forgetting her earlier disapproval. Between them they hauled her up.

"Hai, I can hardly recognise her!" Sita said. "What a state she is in."

Poor Priyatama, her soft white fur was all covered with dirt and cobwebs. She looked awful.

Bimala held her gently and carried her triumphantly downstairs to her mistress. Priyatama's mistress was overjoyed to see her, but rather alarmed at her pet's appearance.

"Oh my poor darling," she cried taking her in her arms. Priyatama was brushed clean and cuddled and given an extra helping of cream.







Chapter VII

ADRAK THE HERO

Adrak slept late the next day. It was afternoon when he woke up. He stretched lazily and walked out into the garden. He wondered how Priyatama was after the night's adventure. For a long time he wandered about in her garden looking in all the likely places. But there was no sign of her, so he went home rather disappointed.

Several days passed and still Adrak had not seen Priyatama. What he did find interesting was the old fish-pond in the garden next door. Since the old house had been empty for such a long time the pond had become dirty and overgrown with weeds. Priyatama's mistress had hired a man to clean it out and stock it with fish. Adrak had been watching them with interest. If there was anything he liked more than hunting mice it was catching fish. His golden eyes became round. Eagerly he waited for the man to finish his work. But his patience was put to the test. Priyatama's mistress was very particular. She kept finding all sorts of extra jobs for the man to do. She wasn't satisfied

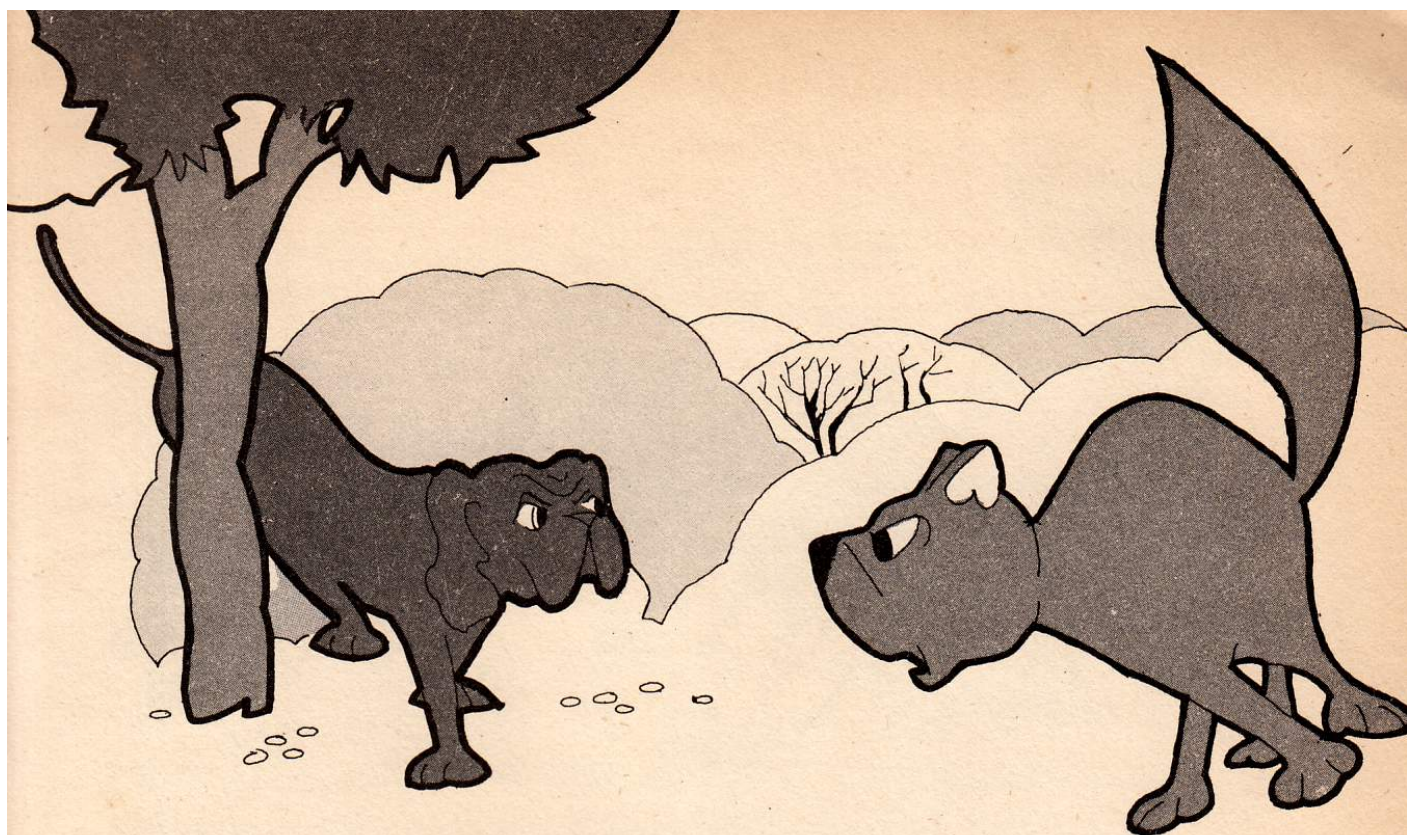
with the arrangement of the plants in the rockery beside the pond. She insisted on it being done again. Adrak decided to return when the man had finished.

It was late afternoon when he entered the garden again. Everything seemed quiet and peaceful. He crept up to the pond, keeping within the shade of the bushes. When he reached the edge of the rockery he saw Priyatama. She was sitting on the grass right at the edge of the pond. The water was smooth and still, like a sheet of glass. Priyatama was leaning over the edge of the water, gazing admiringly at her own reflection. She tilted her head from side to side to get a better view of herself. She was quite unaware of Adrak's presence. He crouched down and watched her.

"How very conceited she is," he thought. She was so taken up with herself and Adrak so intent on watching her that what happened next took them completely by surprise.

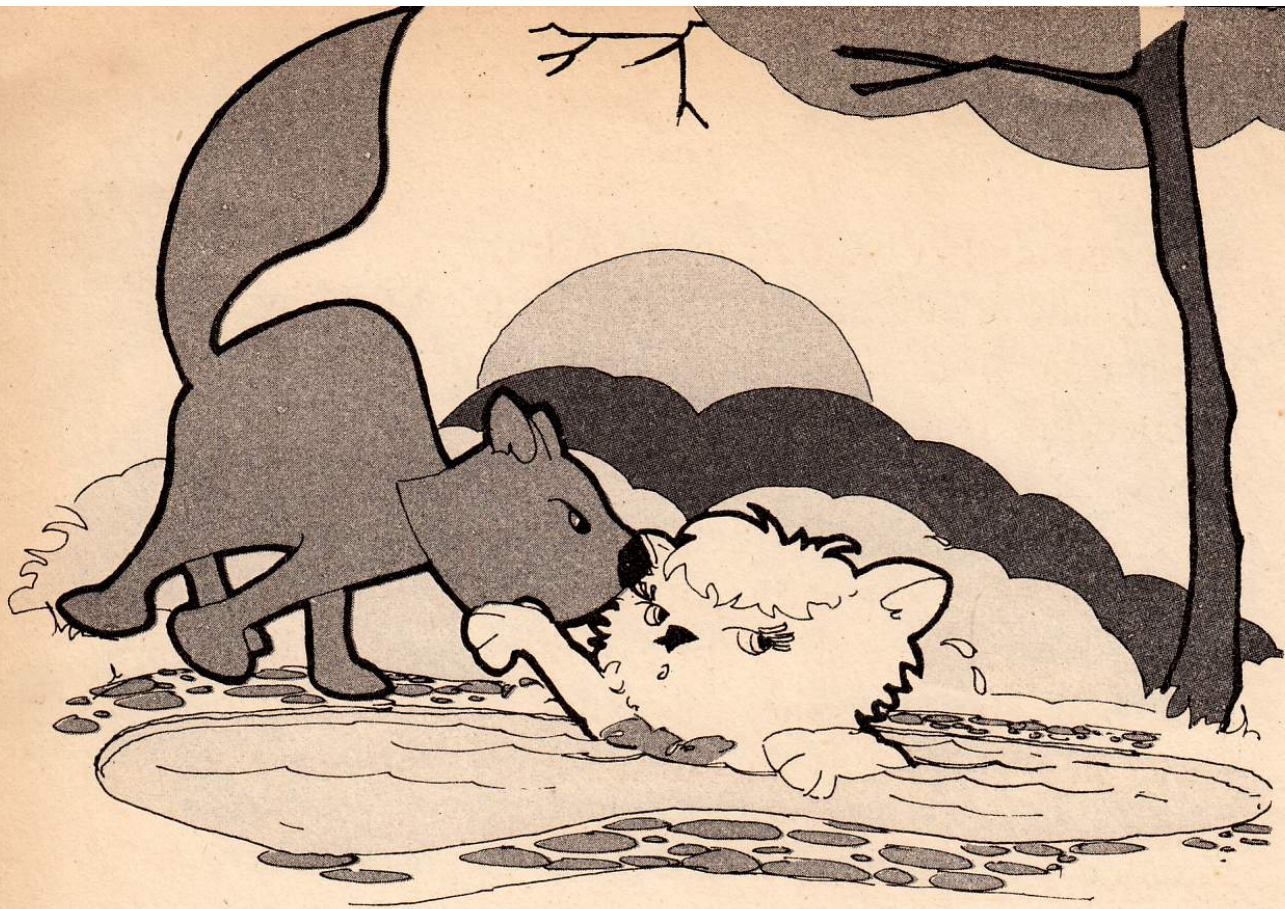
Suddenly a snappy, noisy dog came rushing across the garden straight towards Priyatama. He leapt at her, snarling. In her fright, Priyatama toppled over and fell with a loud splash into the water.

Adrak was filled with alarm. The dog raced round the pond barking furiously. Then it saw Adrak and started towards him. Adrak held his ground. He arched his back and spat at the dog.



The dog was confused. Usually cats ran away when he attacked them. This one was different. It frightened him. He stopped in front of Adrak and snapped at him. Adrak was furious. His paw shot out and scratched the dog's nose. The dog yelped with pain. It turned and fled from the garden and out of the open gate through which it had come.

Adrak then turned his attention to Priyatama who seemed about to drown. She coughed and spluttered, trying to keep her head above the water. Then she saw the familiar flash of golden fur, and recognized her former friend. There was a splash and she felt the firm grip of his powerful jaws as they caught her by the scruff of her neck. The next minute she had been hauled safely onto the bank. She was a sorry sight. She lay out of



breath, covered with mud, her fine fur soaked and in a mess. All she could do was to miaow a feeble thank you to her rescuer.

“Poor old Priyatama,” Adrak thought, as he shook the water from his own fur.

“Oh you clever, clever cat!” an excited voice cried from behind him. Adrak recognised the voice of Priyatama’s mistress. He jumped up, startled.

“Oh you are a brave pussy, rescuing my poor darling Priyatama.” Adrak realized that these words of praise were meant for him. The lady had reached the pond and was gathering up the wet Priyatama into her arms. Then she bent down and

stretched out her hand to stroke Adrak.

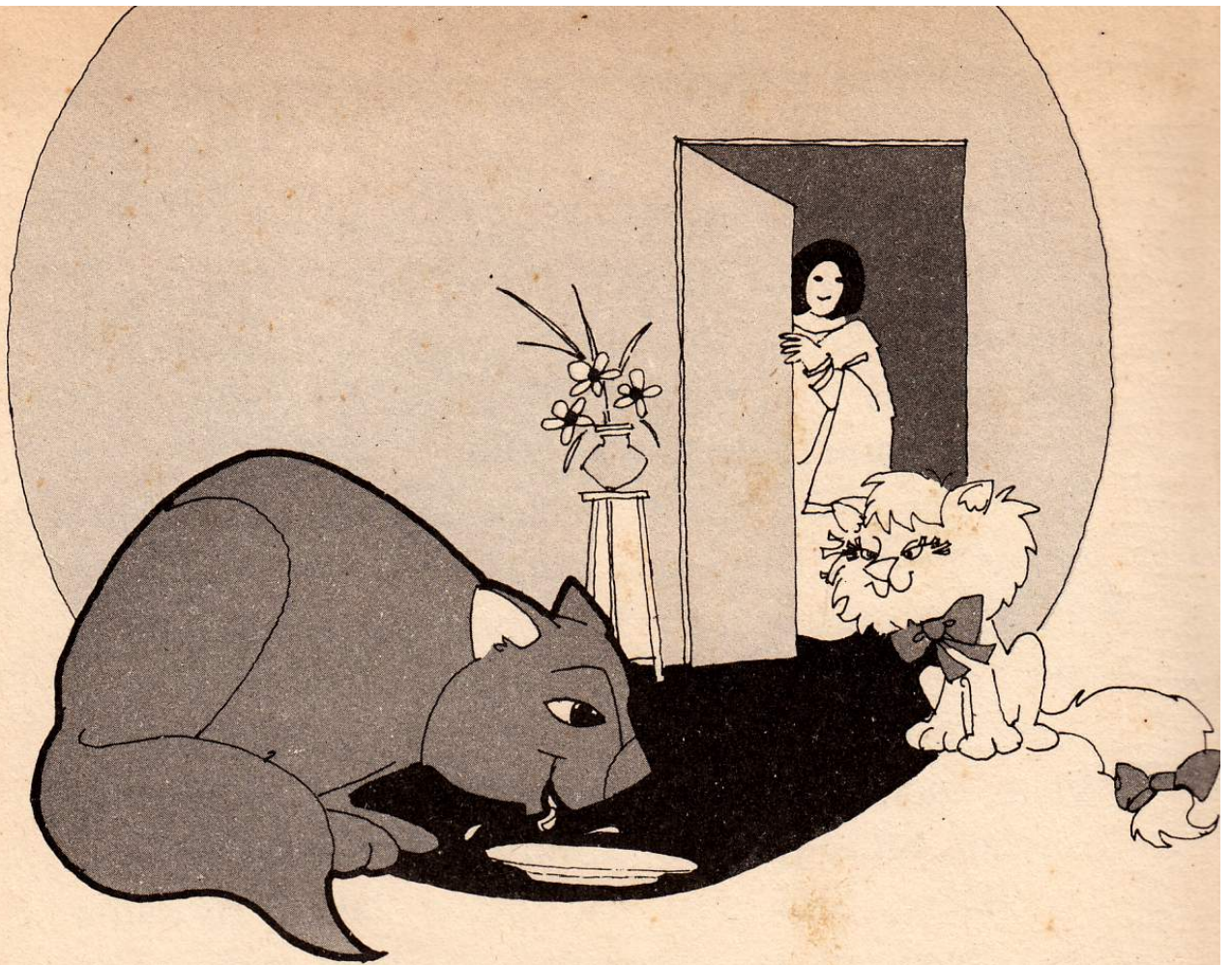
"I saw it all happen," she said. "You saved Priyatama from that nasty dog, and then you rescued her from drowning. You must come up to the house and let me reward you."

Adrak could hardly believe his ears. Obediently he followed the lady and Priyatama up to the house. All the way she kept praising Adrak, telling him how 'grateful she was and what a clever, brave cat he had been. When they entered the living room, Priyatama's mistress rang a bell for the servant. Sita appeared within a few minutes.

"Here, Sita, you had better take Priyatama and clean her up properly," the lady said. "The poor darling! She would have drowned if this brave cat had not saved her. Bring me a towel for him and ask Bimala for two big bowls of cream." Priyatama was carried away and bathed while her mistress herself dried and brushed Adrak.

Soon Priyatama returned looking almost as beautiful as usual. As they lapped up the cream she murmured to Adrak, "I'm sorry I was so snooty. You may not win any prizes at a cat show, but you deserve a medal for being so clever and brave. Thank you, Adrak!"

Adrak purred with happiness. The cream was delicious! And Priyatama actually liked him!



He licked the bowl clean and curled up on the soft carpet beside her. Through half-closed eyes Adrak watched the shadows cast by the setting sun as they flickered on the wall of the sitting room. It seemed to him that the rosy glow within the dancing shadows became goldfish darting among reeds. Adrak sighed contentedly. Life was good.





Adrak is a tough, independent, rat-chasing cat... qualities that don't impress Priyatama, the elegant, exquisitely beautiful cat-next-door. Till one day....



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